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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UK](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: UK IRKS HOLY SEE WITH EMBASSY CHANGES

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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1. (C) The UK has rubbed the Holy See the wrong way with two recent moves that many at the Vatican have taken as slights - or worse. First the British irked the Vatican by moving its embassy to the Holy See into the compound housing its mission to Italy - a diplomatic faux pas at the Vatican. Britain will maintain a separate mission to the Holy See with its own ambassador, but some see the co-location as a threat to the Vatican's policy of not accepting dual accreditation to both Italy and the Holy See of a single ambassador and embassy. On the heels of the embassy co-location, Britain raised more eyebrows by placing advertisements in the media for a new ambassador to the Holy See. Holy See officials privately described the act of placing a public advertisement for a sensitive diplomatic position as "bizarre," and betraying a lack of understanding of the "special nature" of diplomacy at the Vatican. The next UK ambassador will have significant damage to repair in Holy See - UK relations after this "brutta figura." End Summary.

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Co-location Irks Vatican  
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2. (SBU) The UK has rubbed the Holy See the wrong way with two recent moves that many at the Vatican have taken as slights - or worse. HMG has moved her Britannic Majesty's Embassy to the Holy See into the compound housing its mission to Italy - a diplomatic faux pas at the Vatican. Only Israel maintains co-located embassies, and the Holy See has chosen not to make an issue of the situation due to Israel's security concerns and the delicate balance of Vatican - Israel relations. (Sweden moved its Embassy to the Holy See to the same corner building as its mission to Italy in 1994, but with the entrance at a different address. The Swedish ambassador moved to Stockholm in 2001 and now operates mainly from the Swedish FM.)

3. (C) Britain will maintain a separate mission to the Holy See with its own ambassador, but some see the co-location as the first step towards challenging the Vatican's policy of not accepting dual accreditation to both Italy and the Holy See of a single ambassador and embassy. This policy stems from the Lateran Pacts between Italy and the Holy See that created Vatican City State. Monsignor Gabriele Caccia, the Holy See's third-ranking official in the Vatican's equivalent of the Prime Minister's cabinet, told us that the British had cited the lack of a security setback in their old embassy as a reason for the move, and put the best face on things by telling us that there was a separate sign for each mission on the doorway of the new embassy. The signs "are the same size," Caccia added optimistically.

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"Embassy will be Less Effective"  
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4. (C) Holy See UK Country Director Monsignor Bernardito Auza told us the Vatican had not formally protested the move, but had made it clear to the British that they were not happy with the situation. He said he was aware that the UK was cutting costs around the world in the Foreign Office, but said he could not see how moving this one-person operation (the current UK ambassador is the only British diplomat accredited to the Holy See) would save enough money to make up for the resulting strain on Holy See - UK relations. Caccia went on to point out what seems to be common sense: an embassy to the Holy See that co-locates with its Italian sibling is bound to become a subsidiary. "There are different issues, a different character of diplomacy," Caccia said. "It will inevitably make the Embassy to the Holy See less effective," he concluded.

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Former Ambassadors Protest  
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5. (U) A letter from three former British ambassadors to the

Holy See published July 17 in The Times of London and publicized in Vatican-based media was on the same page with the Vatican. The ambassadors protested the "downgrading" of UK relations to the Holy See and noted that the "Holy See's agenda...on global issues of poverty, development, and debt relief" coincided with that of the UK. The ambassadors went on to note that the Vatican was "influential and well informed" and a "first class listening post," in which all other G8 countries have resident diplomats.

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Help Wanted: Ambassador  
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16. (C) On the heels of the embassy co-location, Britain raised more eyebrows at the Vatican by placing advertisements for a new ambassador to the Holy See in the Times newspaper, the Economist magazine, and online. The move became the talk of the Vatican among members of the Curia (mostly either offended or incredulous) as many first assumed the advertisement, originally seen on the internet, was a hoax. Vatican-based media, as others, were bewildered by the advertisement. One top Vatican correspondent put it this way: "Times are a bit tough at the English embassy to the Holy See... Normally the selection of an ambassador is a highly discreet process, often involving delicate questions of diplomacy, geopolitics, and both political and personal interests. In this case, however, the British have opted for a much more direct route: they took out a help wanted ad in the newspaper." Media contacts and others tell us the co-location and the advertisement are signs that the embassy is "just not on the radar screen" in London.

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Advertisement seen as "Bizarre"  
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17. (C) The highly unusual move of advertising for an ambassador irked the Holy See to the extent that during courtesy calls made by the Charge in late July, official after official raised the issue out of the blue. One member of the Roman Curia told us it looked as if after moving the embassy the British had now hit rock bottom. Others described the advertisement as "childish," "bizarre," or betraying a lack of understanding of the "special nature" of diplomacy at the Vatican. All were dumbfounded at the implication that there was no one qualified for the post within the British diplomatic community.

18. (C) Country Director Auza (protect) said he was "disappointed, surprised, and embarrassed" by the placement of an advertisement and its implication that this was a job one would fill in such a mundane way. "They've told us that this is a normal procedure," he said, "but it's not true." Auza noted that the Holy See could reject anyone that the UK proposed, but said the Vatican would not want to add to the embarrassment of the situation - on both sides. While acknowledging that a UK ambassador would not have to be a Catholic, Auza told us that the percentage of Catholics in the UK's foreign service is higher than that in the general population. "It's really strange they felt they had no one at their disposal would be right for the job," he said.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Britain's decision to move its embassy to the Italian mission compound was sure to strain relations with the Vatican and hinder its mission. The public advertisements for an ambassadorial position dug the British an even deeper hole, indicating a lack of sensitivity on the part of Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials that the next UK ambassador will have to go far to repair. The diplomatic corps here has had a field day with the flap, snickering at the impression the UK has made, and suggesting various ludicrous candidates for the position.

110. (C) For her part, current Ambassador Kathryn Colvin must feel as if someone is pulling the rug out from under her. Her deputy was transferred from Rome at the beginning of her tenure, leaving Colvin alone at the embassy. Now she has had to move across town to find herself in the domain of the UK ambassador to Italy. It's no wonder she told a diplomatic colleague here recently she knows what it must have felt like to be the last British Governor in Hong Kong.

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